

11. THE REDTAILED WHEATEAR (*OENANTHE XANTHOPRYMNA*) IN THE DELHI AREA

On the morning of 23rd December, 1977, we saw at Sultanpur Jheel, a bird that we identified as a Redtailed Wheatear (*Oenanthe xanthoprymna*) from Ali and Ripley's HANDBOOK, vol. 9. We watched the bird for ten-fifteen minutes at about twenty to thirty feet. We had never seen it before in several year's bird-watching in Delhi. The bird's description was as follows : Size between sparrow and bulbul. Head and back pale sandy-brown, wings somewhat darker brown. Dull whitish supercilium, dark line through the eye. Rufous rump, chestnut tail with a black terminal band. Below, white, upright posture. So far as we can see, it can only be the Redtailed Wheatear.

D-1/155, SATYA MARG,
CHANAKYAPURI,
NEW DELHI-110 021,

June 11, 1979.

Later we found from Usha Ganguli's A GUIDE TO THE BIRDS OF THE DELHI AREA that its status is accidental and that there is no subsequent record since it was recorded by Holmes in her book BIRD STUDY IN INDIA 1920. Furthermore, Abdulali and Panday's *Checklist of the Birds of Delhi, Agra and Bharatpur* places it in brackets, signifying 'erroneous or needing confirmation' and labels it S?, S signifying 'stray, accidental and far out of normal range', ? signifying 'absence of specimen makes it impossible to determine subspecific identity.'

In the light of this, we think our sighting may be of interest to you.

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12. A CURIOUS ACCIDENT TO THE NEST OF A SUNBIRD

On Sunday 9th September 1979 while driving through Borivli National Park with Rafia and Humayun Abdulali, we saw a nest of the Yellow-backed Sunbird (*Aethopyga siparaja*) hanging from an exposed root in a roadside cutting. We stopped and found that it was old and deserted, but another nest was seen hanging in a similar situation on the other side of the road. No entrance was visible and the nest was covered with earth, first suggesting an attack by white ants.

It was taken down and a closer examination showed that the porch over the entrance was depressed with earth. It contained three eggs, one of which was broken and the other two in a state of decay. The outside of the nest was

covered with streaks of red earth in which the cutting had been made, and the only explanation appears to be that a heavy flow of rain water over the edge of the cutting brought down a lot of earth onto the nest and this, when drying closed the entrance, shutting out the bird.

The nest was washed under a tap and this produced a deluge of earth from all over the outer cover, thus corroborating the above suggestion. This does appear to be a singularly unusual disaster.

In the birds of Bombay and Salsette (1938) Sálím Ali and Humayun Abdulali said that all their records were for the winter months, and they could only quote breeding records from the Bhor Ghat (Khandala) on 17 and 21 September.

Mr. Abdulali has since seen many nests in the surrounding hills, mostly June to September, and almost always in identical facies. On 27 August 1979 he saw a ♀ visiting a nest, almost complete, at the southern end of the park, but it had been torn off a few days later.

13, RETREAT APTS.,
SARASWATI ROAD,
SANTACRUZ (WEST),
BOMBAY-400 054,

September 25, 1979.

The nest is of course very distinctive, showing much coarser material than in the other sun-birds, and lacking the cobweb covering. It is almost invariably attached to roots projecting from roadside cuttings.

PHILLIPPA MUKHERJEE

13. FATAL MALE-MALE CONFLICT IN THE GHARIAL, *GAVIALIS GANGETICUS* (GMELIN) (REPTILIA, CROCODILIA)

(With a text-figure)

Three sub-adult gharial comprising one male and two females, measuring 2.58-2.78 m were liberated into a specially designed breeding pool in Nandankanan Biological Park, Orissa, on 13 February 1976. This pool, 59.5 m in length, 29.7 m in maximum breadth and with a maximum depth of 9.1 m holds 27 lakh litres and is fed with water by a 40 H.P. pump and also has a 10 H.P. recirculation pump. The layout is shown in Figure 1. To provide maximum freedom from disturbances the viewing area is restricted to 30 m and the balance of the 220 m perimeter comprises a 2.05 m high brick and mortar wall. Although courtship and presumed mating were observed in 1977 and 1978 no egg laying occurred and the resident male suffered genital prolapses on 31 January 1977 and again on 30 January 1978. In order to bring about successful breeding, attempts were initiated in 1978 to secure a second male. This male was obtained from Frankfurt Zoological Society, West Germany. This male measured 3.85 m and weighed 195 kg. A third female was obtained from Trivandrum Zoo on

20 February 1979 and three sub-adults, reared at the Tikerpada Gharial Project, District Dhenkanal, Orissa, were added to the breeding pool on 4 January 1979 when they measured 1.83-1.90 m.

The Frankfurt male had had no exposure to members of its own species for many years. It was decided to introduce this new male into the breeding pool while keeping close observation on the behaviour of the resident male. The Frankfurt male was introduced on 11 January 1980 at 2230 hours, having arrived from Hyderabad by truck (a two-day journey) one hour previously. After a lapse of 50 minutes it entered the pool. On the following day it was observed investigating the pool and moving around very close to the overflow (Figure 1). The resident male had as usual occupied his favourite location close to I_1 . This is the only area in the pool where the water is sufficiently low for an animal to lie basking with part of its body out of the water without coming out of the pool.

The next day (13 January 1980) the Frankfurt